

rmp

Risk control

Proper footwear
for the job!



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Proper footwear for the job!

Introduction

Did you know that poor footwear is often the cause of serious falls? Footwear such as sandals, flip-flops, clogs, crocs and very high heels may be a fashionable option, but when worn in the wrong environment, can be very dangerous.

Slips, trips and falls in the classroom, hallways, office areas and outdoors are one of the most frequently reported (and expensive!) claims faced by organisations. Choosing correct footwear is the first step to preventing these types of accidents and their subsequent consequences.

Guidelines for selecting appropriate footwear

Choose footwear that is appropriate to your occupation, working environment and feet.

Make sure that the footwear you select is comfortable, but also conducive to preventing you from slipping in your work area as well as adverse weather conditions.

Footwear that presents a high probability of slipping and falling includes:

- Leather soles / high heels – choose footwear with slip-resistant soles and a low heel.
- Soiled or contaminated soles - clean or remove mud, oil or any other traction-reducing material from shoe/boot soles.
- Footwear that has worn out soles - replace this footwear immediately as slip-resistance is greatly reduced.
- Sole material that is inappropriate for the work surface/floor conditions - avoid leather soles on wet floor surface conditions. Choose lower heels for work operations and tasks, etc.
- Also be aware of trousers that are too long. They can catch on objects and cause you to trip.

Additionally, when purchasing new footwear, consider these tips to avoid slips and trips:

- Do not try on shoes when your feet are hurting.
- The best time to try on shoes is in the mid-afternoon. When trying on shoes wear the hosiery or socks that you would normally wear.
- Always have both feet measured because your feet may not be the same size. When choosing shoes, the length, width and depth of the shoes are important to consider.

- Make sure that there is enough room at the front of the shoes (about 1cm of space between your longest toe and the end of the shoe) to allow for natural movement of your toes when walking.
- Make sure there is enough room so that you can comfortably wiggle your toes.
- Try on both shoes, properly laced, and walk around the shop.
- Walk over varying surfaces of the floor to further check the fit of the shoe.
- Don't break in new shoes. Shoes that fit well should feel comfortable.
- Keep in mind that as you get older, your feet tend to get larger, so have them measured periodically.

Steps for preventing slips, trips and falls

- 1 DON'T BE IN A HURRY** - Trips and falls often occur while people are in a hurry because they often take short cuts and don't pay attention to what they are doing.
- 2 PAY ATTENTION TO YOUR STEP** - Avoid injuries by paying attention to where you are walking. Learning to recognise hazards and avoiding potential hazards saves time, money and injury. As mentioned previously, resist the temptation to take short cuts because short cuts are usually comprised of objects or routes designed for foot traffic and often consist of unstable, shaky or slippery surfaces.
- 3 CLEAN UP SPILLS** - Slippery surfaces often don't appear dangerous until you happen to step on them—and then it's too late to stop the consequences of your actions. Clean up grease, water and other spills as you notice them. Cover icy and greasy spots with sand, dirt or other types of absorbent materials. If you are unable to clean up a spill, report it to the maintenance staff or your supervisor immediately.
- 4 PRACTICE WALKING SAFELY** - If you cannot avoid walking on slippery or wet surfaces, practice walking safely across them. Don't try to run, jump or slide across these slick surfaces. Instead, take slow short steps with your toes pointed slightly outward. For additional balance, keep your hands at your sides (not in your pockets) to support you if you begin to fall. Remember that a freshly polished floor can also be very slick even though it doesn't usually appear hazardous.

5 USE NON-SKID SHOES AND SURFACES WHEN AVAILABLE

- If you work in an area that has slippery surfaces, wear shoes that have slip-resistant soles. Keep your shoes free from grease and oil. On large walkways, use mats or rough grade coverings to assist in minimising falls.

6 MAINTAIN PROPER LIGHTING - Inadequate lighting can camouflage what is in your way, so replace light fixtures or bulbs that don't work. When you enter a darkened room, always turn on the light first, even if you stay only for a moment. Keep walkways clear of obstructions in areas that have poor lighting.

7 STAIR SAFETY - Stairs that are too steep or not steep enough can create the potential for trips and falls. Because it is very easy to lose your footing while climbing stairs, walk up and down stairs slowly. Be cautious of worn or broken steps, objects left on the steps, and of insufficient lighting that may make it difficult to see properly. Never run up or down stairs and avoid skipping steps. If you have to carry a load while climbing stairs, carry the load so it doesn't block your vision, and keep one hand free, if possible, to hold onto the wall railing.

8 INSPECT YOUR LADDER - Check your ladder to ensure the rungs are in good condition and that it has no cracks or broken parts. If the ladder is equipped with a spreader that locks the ladder frame into position, make sure it is secured before you begin to climb. Most importantly, check to make sure the ladder is the correct height for the task at hand. This will prevent you from reaching too far forward or upward, which could cause you to become off balance.

9 NEVER USE MAKESHIFT LADDERS - Never use chairs, furniture, boxes or other makeshift platforms in place of a ladder.

10 CORDS AND CABLES - Re-route cords and cables that may be present across aisles, in front of desks or along walkways. Other options include covering cords that run across an aisle with a protective bridge or hanging loose cables from pre-gummed hooks.

Procurement of footwear

Choosing footwear from a host of products which are on the market can be difficult. With terminology such as 'improved grip performance' to 'excellent multi directional slip resistance'. Usually footwear is described as slip resistant but with no indication on which surface and for what roles it would be suitable.

So when purchasing a number of factors need to be considered such as:

- Slip resistance
- Durability
- Comfort
- Cost
- Safety features – toe protection

The final choice may have to be a compromise.

It's always a good idea to check with your supplier whether the footwear you are interested in has been actually slip resistance tested. Where footwear has been tested, coefficient of friction (CoF) test values must be available. The higher the value the better the slip resistance.

The minimum requirements are set out in annex A of EN ISO EN ISO 20345:2011 to be replaced by ISO/FDIS 20345– footwear that has passed the for slip resistance test will be marked with the following codes

SRA – tested on ceramic tile wetted with dilute soap solution

SRB – tested on smooth steel and glycerol

SRC – tested under both conditions

These tests are not wholly representative of all underfoot surfaces, so additional information will have to be sort to help identify the best footwear for a particular environment.

Conclusion

There are numerous factors which contribute to an individual slipping or tripping resulting in a fall. One of which is footwear. The term 'one size fits all' doesn't apply in this case as everyone's feet are different. So footwear needs to be carefully consider if buying in bulk as people will make their feelings known if they are expected to wear uncomfortable shoes for 8 hrs a day. If you are allowing personal to purchase footwear themselves then clear guidelines must be given to staff in relation to the requirements of the footwear you expect them to wear.

References

- 1 <https://www.hse.gov.uk/slips/footprocure.htm> (Revised Nov 2021)

Further information

For access to further RMP Resources you may find helpful in reducing your organisation's cost of risk, please access the RMP Resources or RMP Articles pages on our website. To join the debate follow us on our LinkedIn page.

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